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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of :
Kyle Broussard :
Application No. 10/662,487 :
Filed: September 15, 2003 :
Attorney Docket Number: :
20030829 : ON PETITION

This is a decision on the petition to revive the application under 37 CFR § 137(a) July 1, 2005.

The Petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is hereby dismissed.

Any further petition to revive the above-identified application must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 CFR 1.137." This is **not** final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 704.

The above-identified application became abandoned for failure to timely and properly reply to the Notice of Non-compliant Amendment ("Notice"), mailed November 10, 2004. The Notice set a one (1) month period for reply. Applicant filed a response to the Notice on November 15, 2004; however, the response failed to comply with the Notice. No proper response having been received, the application became abandoned on December 11, 2004. A Notice of Abandonment was mailed June 20, 2005.

Applicant files the instant petition wherein Applicant asserts that the response to the Notice filed November 15, 2004 was a bona fide reply to the Notice, and Applicant should have been notified by this Office, as required by MPEP 714.03, that his reply was deficient. Such notification, Applicant asserts, would have allowed him to timely remedy any deficiencies such that a complete and proper reply to the Notice could have been filed.

Applicant provides the following quote, including italics and underlining for emphasis, of MPEP 714.03:

"Where there is sufficient time remaining in the period for reply (including extensions under 37 CFR 1.136(a)), the applicant may simply be notified that the omission must be supplied within the remaining time period for reply. This notification should be made, if possible, by telephone. And. When such notification is made by telephone, an interview summary record (see MPEP 713.04) must be completed and entered into the file application to provide a record of such notification. A Grantable Petition Under 37 CFR 1.137(a)

A grantable petition to revive an abandoned application under 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be accompanied by: (1) the required reply (unless previously filed), which may met by the filing of a notice of appeal and the requisite fee; a Request for Continued Examination; an amendment or request for reconsideration which *prima facie* places the application in condition for allowance, or a first or second submission under 37 CFR 1.129(a) if the application has been pending for at least two years as of June 8, 1995, taking into account any reference made in such application to any earlier filed application under 35 USC 120, 121 and 365(c); (2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(1); (3) a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) was unavoidable; and (4) any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.20(d)) required pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(c).

Applicant lacks item (3) as set forth above.

Applicable Law

The general standard applied by the Office requires petitioner to establish that petitioner treated the patent the same as a reasonable and prudent person would treat his or her most important business.¹ 35 U.S.C. § 41(c)(1) states, "The Commissioner may accept the payment of any maintenance fee ... at any time ... if the delay is shown to *the satisfaction of the Commissioner* to have been unavoidable." (emphasis added).

¹ The Commissioner is responsible for determining the standard for unavoidable delay and for applying that standard.

"In the specialized field of patent law, ... the Commissioner of Patent and Trademarks is primarily responsible for the application and enforcement of the various narrow and technical statutory and regulatory provisions. His interpretation of those provisions is entitled to considerable deference." Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F.Supp. 900, 904, 16 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), aff'd without opinion (Rule 36), 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (citing Morganroth v. Quigg, 885 F.2d 843, 848, 12 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1125 (Fed. Cir. 1989); Ethicon, Inc. v. Quigg, 849 F.2d 1422, 1425, 7 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1152 (Fed. Cir. 1988) ("an agency' interpretation of a statute it administers is entitled to deference"); see also Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 844, 81 L. Ed. 694, 104 S. Ct. 2778 (1984) ("if the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to the specific issue, the question for the court is whether the agency's answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute.")).

"The critical phrase 'unless it be shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that such delay was unavoidable' has remained unchanged since first enacted in 1861." Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (D.C. Cir. 1982). The standard for "unavoidable" delay for reinstating a patent is the same as the unavoidable standard for reviving an application. See Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608-609, 34 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1786, 1787 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (citing In re patent No. 4,409,763, 7 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1798, 1800 (Comm'r Pat. 1990; Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (D.C. Cir. 1982)). The court in In re Mattullath, accepted the standard which had been proposed by Commissioner Hall which "requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business." In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-515 (1912) (quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)). However, "The question of whether an applicant's delay in prosecuting an application was unavoidable [will] be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking all of the facts and circumstances into account."² Nonawareness of the content of, or a misunderstanding of, PTO statutes, PTO rules, the MPEP, or Official Gazette notices, does not constitute unavoidable delay.³ The statute requires a "showing"

² Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (1982).

³ See Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (Fed. Cir. 1982) (citing Potter v. Dann, 201 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 574 (D. D.C. 1978) for

by petitioner. Therefore, petitioner has the burden of proof. The decision will be based solely on the written, administrative record in existence. It is not enough that the delay was unavoidable; petitioner must prove that the delay was unavoidable. A petition will not be granted if petitioner provides insufficient evidence to "show" that the delay was unavoidable.

Applicant is further advised that the Patent and Trademark Office must rely on the actions or inactions of duly authorized and voluntarily chosen representatives of the applicant, and applicant is bound by the consequences of those actions or inactions. Link v. Wabash, 370 U.S. 626, 633-34 (1962); Huston v. Ladner, 973 F.2d 1564, 1567, 23 USPQ2d 1910, 1913 (Fed. Cir. 1992); see also Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 317, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1132 (D.N. Ind. 1987). Specifically, petitioner's delay caused by the actions or inactions of his voluntarily chosen representative does not constitute unavoidable delay within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. 133 or 37 CFR 1.137(a). Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 5 USPQ2d 1130 (D. Ind. 1987); Smith v. Diamond, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); Potter v. Dann, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); Ex parte Murray, 1891 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 130, 131 (Comm'r Pat. 1891). In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912) (quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff'd, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm'r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). Finally, a "delay (in responding) resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice, or MPEP, [] does not constitute unavoidable delay." MPEP 711.03(c).

Applicant's Assertion

Applicant files the instant petition and states that the Examiner or Office Staff failed to Notify Applicant by phone as required by MPEP 714.03.

the proposition that counsel's nonawareness of PTO rules does not constitute "unavoidable" delay)); Vincent v. Mossinghoff, 1985 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 23119, 13, 230 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 621 (D. D.C. 1985) (Plaintiffs, through their counsel's actions, **or their own**, must be held responsible for having noted the MPEP section and Official Gazette notices expressly stating that the certified mailing procedures outlined in 37 CFR 1.8(a) do not apply to continuation applications.) (Emphasis added).

Analysis

As to (3), Applicant has failed to demonstrate that the entire delay was unavoidable. Applicant alleges that the Examiner's or this Office's failure to notify him contributed to his delay in filing a response.

A review of MPEP 714.03 as quoted by Applicant makes it clear that the applicant may simply be notified. This is not a requirement. The word "may" is defined as "hav[ing] the ability to; hav[ing] permission to; used to indicate possibility or probability." Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition 1998. It is clear that the Examiner has the ability to, or has permission to notify an Applicant, but is not required to notify an Applicant.

Here, Applicant's emphasis is mis-placed. Applicant emphasizes the word "must", but the word "must" as quoted by Applicant, modifies the word "omission", and refers to the omission that "must" be supplied, NOT that the applicant "must" be notified. Again, the applicant "may" be notified.

Applicant apparently misunderstands the patent rules. Applicant is advised that nonawareness of the content of, or a misunderstanding of, PTO statutes, PTO rules, the MPEP, or Official Gazette notices, does not constitute unavoidable delay. Moreover, a delay caused by an applicant's lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP is not rendered 'unavoidable' due to: (1) the applicant's reliance upon oral advice from Office employees; or (2) the Office's failure to advise the applicant of any deficiency in sufficient time to permit the applicant to take corrective action. See In re Sivertz, 227 USPQ 255, 256 (Comm'r Pat. 1985); see also In re Colombo, Inc., 33 USPQ2d 1530, 1532 (Comm'r Pat. 1994) *(while the Office attempts to notify applicants of deficiencies in their responses in a manner permitting a timely correction, the Office has no obligation to notify parties of deficiencies in their responses in a manner permitting a timely correction)* (Emphasis supplied).

Accordingly, because the Examiner did not notify Applicant of Applicant's filing mistake(s) does not render the delay unavoidable.

Furthermore, it is noted that the failure to respond to the Notice is the reason for the abandonment. Applicant is directed to the MPEP, section 711.02, which reads:

37 CFR 1.135(a) specifies that an application becomes abandoned if applicant 'fails to reply' to an office action within the fixed statutory period. This failure may result either from (A) failure to reply within the statutory period, or (B) insufficiency of reply, i.e. failure to file a 'complete and proper reply, as the condition of the case may require' within the statutory period (37 CFR 1.135(b)).

This section clearly explains that abandonment occurs when Applicant fails to timely and properly reply to the outstanding Office action.

Regarding Applicant's argument, that the Examiner's or this Office's notification to Applicant would have allowed Applicant to take measures to avoid abandonment, Applicant is directed to 37 CFR 1.135(b), Abandonment For Failure to Reply Within Time Period, which reads:

Prosecution of an application to save it from abandonment pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section must include such complete and proper reply as the condition of the application may require. The admission of, or refusal to admit, any amendment after final rejection or any amendment not responsive to the last action, or any related proceedings, will not operate to save the application from abandonment.

This section is further clarified in the Manual of Patent Examining Procedure ('MPEP'), which provides

[f]or example, as 37 CFR 1.116 and 1.135(b) are manifest that proceedings concerning amendment after final rejection will not operate to avoid abandonment of the application in the absence of a timely and proper appeal, a delay is not 'unavoidable' when the applicant simply permits the maximum extendable statutory period for reply to a final Office action to expire while awaiting a notice of allowance or other action.

This section explains that a delay is not unavoidable when the applicant-petitioner is awaiting an action from the examiner. In other words, when Applicant filed the response to the non-final Office action, it was Applicant's responsibility to file a complete and proper reply as the application required in the first instance.

Conclusion

The evidence has been considered, but is not persuasive that the delay was unavoidable. As iterated above, a delay is not 'unavoidable' when the applicant simply permits the maximum extendable statutory period for reply to a final Office action to expire while awaiting a notice of allowance or other action. Accordingly, the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is dismissed.

Alternative venue

Applicant is strongly urged to file a petition stating that the delay was unintentional. Public Law 97-247, § 3, 96 Stat. 317 (1982), which revised patent and trademark fees, amended 35 U.S.C. § 41(a)(7) to provide for the revival of an "unintentionally" abandoned application without a showing that the delay in was "unavoidable." An "unintentional" petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by the required fee, currently \$750.00.

The filing of a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) cannot be intentionally delayed and therefore must be filed promptly. A person seeking revival due to unintentional delay can not make a statement that the delay was unintentional unless the entire delay, including the delay from the date it was discovered that the application was abandoned until the filing of the petition to revive under 37 CFR 1.137(b), was unintentional. A statement that the delay was unintentional is not appropriate if petitioner intentionally delayed the filing of a petition for revive under 37 CFR 1.137(b).

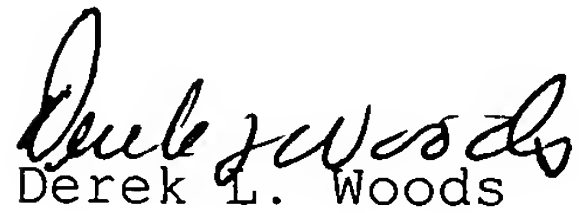
Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

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By FAX: (571) 273-8300
 Attn: Office of Petitions

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Telephone inquiries concerning this matter should be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3232.



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